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The Fate of the Novgorodian Republic

JOEL RABA

THE extinction of the Novgorodian Republic by Moscow in 1478 took place after a number of military campaigns—in 1456, 1471 and 1478—interspersed with political skirmishes. These events are usually described as successive stages in the strengthening of Russian absolutism: the emergent centralised monarchy of Moscow gradually increased its pressure upon Novgorod until the Republic lost its independent status. It would, however, be more accurate to see the struggle as one between two completely different political entities, marked by retreats, hesitations and efforts to reach a compromise.

I

Four aspects of this process may usefully be distinguished. The first is the conflict of political principle. Novgorod was evidently prepared to rest content with the status of a separate, semi-independent Russian state, ignoring, as far as possible, what transpired in other parts of Russia, while playing a major rôle in cultural and economic affairs. But the grand principality of Moscow had reached a stage in its history when it sought to bring the whole of Russia, or at least the eastern part, under its centralised control. The conflict was one between an absolutist state in the making and a medieval urban republic. The outcome would determine which of the two forms of government was the more efficient.

Secondly, we should consider the military aspect. The fundamental difference between the armies of both sides did not lie in the extent of their material resources; nor was there a great discrepancy in military experience. Even the official chronicles of Moscow say that in the battle of Staraya Rusa (1456) the Novgorodian soldiers were well accoutred, a statement which is corroborated by archaeological finds.¹ The struggle against the Livonian Order and the battles in the north testified to the military prowess of the Novgorodian army. But a weakness can be detected in its very strength. The Ustyug chronicle states (for the year 1470) that Novgorodian artisans set out together with Prince Vasiliy Shuysky to Dvina.² All the sources which mention

¹ *Polnoye Sobraniye Russkikh Letopisey*, XXV, p. 274 (quoted hereafter as *PSRL*); A. V. Artsikhovsky, 'Novgorod Velikiy po arkheologicheskim dannym', *Novgorod. K 1100-letiyu goroda*, Moscow, 1964, p. 45.

² *Ustyuzhskiy letopisnyy svod*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1950, p. 89 (quoted hereafter as *ULS*).

the defeat of the Novgorodians in the battle of Shelona in 1471 inform us of the decisive rôle played by the numerous artisans there. The fate of the 1456 operation was determined—according to one Novgorodian source—by lack of co-ordination between the various units involved, some of which deserted the battlefield. After their initial success they preferred to loot the corpses of the Moscow soldiers.³

In other words, in contrast to the well-organised Muscovite army, composed mainly of professionals in the service of the grand prince and other princes, and disciplined under the sole command of the grand prince,⁴ in Novgorod we have a huge amorphous mass lacking unified leadership. It consists of the troop of the serving prince—a professional force, but one foreign to its employer—and a *levée en masse* of citizens inexperienced in the arts of warfare. The latter could have been of assistance in an attack against traditional foes, such as the Order, and proved its worth in passive resistance against the Muscovite invader (by devastating the vicinity of Novgorod), but was unable to withstand a direct clash with this enemy. The battles of Rusa (1456), Shelona (1471) and Dvina (1471) furnish ample evidence of deficient co-ordination. It is stated that the Novgorodians showed readiness to fight but were rapidly overcome with fatigue, and that they engaged in discussions and quarrels before the battle of Shelona.

Although Novgorod was indubitably capable of armed resistance, this was essentially passive, calculated only to hold up the invading force.⁵ Since the Muscovites did not intend to desist before they had destroyed the republican army—apparently the main objective of the first two expeditions—the Novgorodian tactics were foredoomed to failure.

Thirdly, in the final event Novgorod did not find itself opposed to Moscow alone. Owing to his political position, the ruler of Moscow could command the participation in every engagement of his brothers' units, those of rulers of other principalities (Kholmsk, Tver') and of the serving Tatar units. That is to say, the military resources of the whole of eastern Russia were arraigned against the northern state. In preparing for these campaigns, Ivan III recognised the fundamental importance of his objective. It entailed the destruction of a political entity that was purely Russian in origin, but which

³ *PSRL*, XXVI, pp. 194–5.

⁴ To give only one example: The Moscow soldiers before the battle of Rusa (1456) say: 'If we do not go and fight against them, we shall die at the hand [lit., of his command] of our ruler the grand prince' (*PSRL*, XXV, p. 274).

⁵ These tactics included the devastation of the vicinity of Novgorod by the people; this was successful in 1456 and 1471, but in 1477 failed from the outset because of the counter-measures adopted by Ivan III (*PSRL*, XXV, p. 275; XXVIII, p. 147; *ULS*, p. 89).

had a form of government essentially different from that which Moscow proposed to enforce on Russia.⁶ For this reason military action was preceded by ideological preparation designed to show that the Novgorodians and their authorities were estranged, disloyal and traitorous. The ruler of Moscow took good care to mobilise public opinion by holding repeated consultations with the more eminent representatives of the priesthood and nobility. The participation of the metropolitan, many archbishops, and particularly the grand prince's mother in these consultations (1471) shows that Ivan III's appeal was directed mainly to his close supporters and relatives,⁷ whose assistance he sought against those who 'accused me of lying' (1478).⁸

The support of the higher echelons having been obtained, it became necessary to enlist the sympathies of the general public. No military expedition or political action undertaken by Ivan III was accompanied by so much ideological demonstration as his campaigns against Novgorod. In 1471 the grand prince made an ostentatious pilgrimage to the Moscow churches, praying at the graves of the martyrs and saints. In the words of the Moscow chronicle, his war against Novgorod resembled his grandfather's campaign against Mamay: 'They [the people of Novgorod] are called christians, but their actions are worse than those of infidels'; the account concludes: 'And thus the grand prince makes war on them not as christians, but as idolaters and traitors to orthodoxy'.⁹ In this moral preparation the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Metropolitan Philip, played a most important part. His letter addressed to the people of Novgorod provides a 'legal' basis for the aspirations of the grand prince of Moscow: accusations of religious betrayal are of secondary importance even here. The most significant line in his letter is identical in tone to that customary in the chronicles, written and now 'corrected' by the Moscow dyaks:

The Moscow grand princes, beginning with the Grand Prince Vladimir and continuing until Ioann Vasil'eich in the present time; they are Russian christian rulers and your masters. (Metropolitan Philip.)
 Novgorod the Great and all the people of Novgorod, their fathers and grandfathers and forefathers, are their [the grand princes'] patrimony and have never departed from them. (First Sophian chronicle.)¹⁰

⁶ PSRL, XXV, pp. 274, 286, 288, 311.

⁷ It is noteworthy that the political struggle of the grand prince's brothers really began only after Novgorod's final defeat, immediately after its downfall. Ivan's successes against Novgorod signalled the potential danger to the authority of the princes, including the junior members of the Moscow dynasty.

⁸ PSRL, XXV, pp. 286, 310.

⁹ PSRL, XXV, pp. 287-8.

¹⁰ S. M. Solov'yov, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vrem'yon* Moscow, 1960, V, p. 16; PSRL, VI, p. 3.

In essence the ideological conflict waged by Moscow against Novgorod in the final years of the struggle was an attempt to strengthen traditional ties, which had not altered formally while Novgorod was consolidating its *de facto* independence. Now the suzerain was determined to enforce full observance of his legal rights. At his side, ready to suit appearances to the needs of policy, stood the organisation of the Church; also at his disposal was a corps of well-instructed writers and officials who could justify by reference to contemporary literature and historiography his military expeditions against 'the traitors to their religion and their ruler'.

The fourth aspect of the conflict to be considered is that of the allies to which Novgorod could look for support. Her only practicable ally was the grand duchy of Lithuania. The turning-point in Novgorod's relations with Lithuania was the conclusion of the famous 'agreement' of 1471.¹¹ Does this furnish the basis for the accusations of treason which are levelled by many Russian historians against the Novgorodian government of that year? Their main contention is that 'this was an attempt . . . to place Novgorod under the authority of Casimir'.¹²

There seems to be no doubt as to the existence of the agreement. Although it has only been preserved in copies made in Moscow in the 1470s, prior to the final action that was to destroy Novgorod's independence, the contents themselves militate against a presumption of fraud. A forgery would have laid greater stress on the dependence of Novgorod on the king of Poland. We may also ask why this important political document should have been discovered among the effects of the Novgorodian army commanders at Shelona. It is thought that the document cannot possibly have been handed over to Casimir or his delegates.¹³ We suggest, therefore, that this may have been a draft of the proposed agreement, probably formulated by the Novgorodian commanders (Dmitriy Boretsky and his followers) on their way to Shelona. Their motives remain uncertain. They may have intended to prepare the way for a new political orientation of the Novgorodian state; another possibility is that this was designed to serve as a card in

¹¹ *Gramoty Velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1949, No. 77 (quoted hereafter as *GVNP*).

¹² L. A. Dmitrieva, *Povesti o zhizni Mikhaila Klopskogo*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1958, p. 28. Compare also: *Ocherki istorii SSSR: period feodalizma, XIV-XV vv.*, Moscow, 1953, p. 275; V. N. Bernadsky, *Novgorod i Novgorodskaya zemlya v XV v.*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1961, p. 272.

¹³ K. V. Bazilevich, *Vneshnyaya politika russkogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva: vtoraya polovina XV v.*, Moscow, 1952, p. 97; A. A. Zimin, 'O kchronologii dogovornykh gramot Velikogo Novgoroda s knyaz'yami XIII-XV vv.', *Problemy istoricheskogo vedomstva*, V, Moscow, 1956, p. 326. The view that the agreement was submitted to a second party (V. N. Bernadsky, *op. cit.*, p. 270; L. V. Cherepkin, *Obrazovanie russkogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva v XIV-XV vekakh: ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoy i politicheskoy istorii Rusi*, Moscow, 1960, p. 856) is based on tendentious and anti-Novgorod sources, such as the Pskov chronicle or the pro-Moscow composition ('*Slovesa izbrannyye*') from the fourth Novgorodian chronicle.

the political game with Moscow in negotiations following the battle. Whatever its object, the document became a political factor only after its seizure by the Muscovites, who were able to exploit it as a major argument against the defeated enemy.

The contents of the document are both interesting and characteristic of traditional Novgorodian thinking. Confronted by the fatal danger overshadowing the state, its leaders had evidently decided to attempt a political reorientation. Their aim was to obtain new formal recognition of their rights from a different suzerain. In the eyes of the Novgorodians Casimir was not regarded as the Catholic king of Poland but as the grand prince of Lithuania. This was mainly an Orthodox state, its predominant language being a west Russian dialect. Lithuania, or at least part of it, was considered both politically and commercially to be one of the regions of Russia as a wider entity (as, for example, in the agreement with Svidrigailo of 1431).¹⁴ The only innovation, therefore, lay in the desire of the Novgorodians—or, more precisely, of some of their leaders—to choose a new formal suzerain, the grand prince of Lithuania rather than the grand prince of Moscow. Their intention at this point was to limit his legal jurisdiction and also to obtain additional privileges for the feudal land-owners *vis-à-vis* the peasants and slaves. In exchange for the military assistance anticipated from Casimir, they would have agreed to accept the authority of a governor appointed by the king, who, however, would have to be a member of the Orthodox faith. In this way, and by banning the erection of new Catholic churches on Novgorodian territory, emphasis was placed upon the link with Lithuania (rather than with the 'Polish-Lithuanian state', which, incidentally, did not as yet exist).¹⁵ Such a conception accorded precisely with the political outlook of the Novgorodian leaders. In addition, the authentic Novgorodian touch is felt in the insistence on the right to apply for ordination of the archbishop 'to any place we wish in Orthodox Christianity', i.e., to the head of the Orthodox Church of either Lithuania or Moscow.

Thus the draft of the contemplated agreement may be regarded as an expression of aims consistently and traditionally held by the Novgorodian government. In the new circumstances of 1471 it was prepared to change its suzerain, but this change was less fundamental than it appears to be, since Novgorod's independent status was to be preserved. This explains why the attempt failed. Even if the results of the battle of Shelona had been less calamitous and the presumed

¹⁴ On the position of Lithuania, compare extensive discussions in: H. Jablonowski, *Westrussland zwischen Wilna und Moskau*, Leiden, 1961; O. P. Backus, *Motives of West Russian nobles in deserting Lithuania for Moscow, 1377-1514*, Lawrence, 1957.

¹⁵ V. N. Bernadsky, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

authors of the draft agreement had not perished there, it cannot be assumed that Casimir, the elected king of Poland, would have been prepared to countenance such a marked difference in the status of his two states, Lithuania and Novgorod. The episode in which Prince Michael Olel'kovich was concerned could have made for closer co-operation between Novgorod and Lithuania, but in the event it only served to demonstrate the rigidity of the Novgorodian boyars and their unwillingness to abandon 'Russian' interests. This prince was selected from circles opposed to Grand Prince Casimir, from a family which was closely connected with such a traditionally Russian region of Lithuania as Kiev and was closely related to the grand prince of Moscow.¹⁶ Apparently, this choice was seen as only an intermediate stage in fulfilling the consistent and more easily intelligible plan set out in the draft found on the battlefield of Shelona. By its actions, however, the government of Novgorod merely succeeded in alerting Moscow to its intention to take a crucial decision, one that would affect Moscow more than Novgorod itself. At the same time Novgorod did not obtain the support of the Lithuanian grand prince, whose interests were bound up with those of the Polish kingdom.

It was in these circumstances—lacking allies, increasingly isolated from other Russian territories, and in a state of acknowledged military inferiority—that the Novgorodian Republic and its inhabitants had to fight for their rights and privileges against the supreme ruler of an emerging centralised monarchy. The most outstanding feature of this confrontation was the obstinate resistance offered by the people of Novgorod at each stage to every encroachment on their authority, whereas Moscow, despite its military superiority, made only a slow, cautious and restrained advance.

The reason for this surely lies in the special nature of the conflict. The ruler of Moscow did not find himself opposed to a familiar political body. When pitted against Tver' or Nizhniy Novgorod, the grand prince of Moscow could foster family feuds among his opponents (he could, for instance, aggravate differences between the grand princes of Tver' or Ryazan' and the princes of the less important branches in Kholmsk and Pronsk); he could restrict or nullify the rights of the local prince, as in the case of Yaroslavl' or Rostov; eventually, he could deprive the local ruler of all his supporters by attracting his boyars to the service of Moscow. But none of these methods would have proved a suitable weapon in the attempt to destroy Novgorod. Every appeal and promise to the Novgorodian populace was entirely lacking in effectiveness because the ruler of Moscow was profoundly unfamiliar with the Novgorodian political structure and the Nov-

¹⁶ For the whole Olel'kovich episode, see the profound discussion in K. V. Bazilevich, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–96.

gorodians themselves showed no tendency to adapt themselves to his wishes.

Naturally, it should not be assumed that this could be recognised in clear and definite terms by the plebeian members of the *veche*, but at the same time there is little doubt that they were instinctively aware of the implications of the matter. Notwithstanding the complete political domination of Novgorod by the boyars, the very existence of the *veche* was a guarantee that consideration would be taken of the popular will as publicly expressed. Conscious of this bulwark, the Novgorodian boyars could join the struggle to uphold the rights of the state, in which their own interests were also involved.

It is thus possible to describe Moscow's policy as an attempt to attract the Novgorodians, and the plebeian members of the *veche* in particular, ever more closely to its side. After all such efforts had failed, it had no other course but to break the citizens' resistance by the use of force.

II

The first link in this slowly forged chain, this policy of mutual restraint and of 'advance and retreat', is the agreement of Yazhelbitsy in 1456.¹⁷ One may question Florinsky's observation that 'under the terms of the peace agreement Novgorod . . . was incorporated within the Muscovite state'.¹⁸ Were the events at Yazhelbitsy in fact the 'turning-point'¹⁹ in the relationship between Moscow and Novgorod?

This argument is based mainly on the passages (or, more precisely, sentences) in the agreement which deprive the *veche* of the right to issue documents ('a vechnym gramotam ne byti') and impose the obligation to use the grand prince's seal ('a pechatи byti knyazey velikikh'). It seems, however, that both these injunctions merely mark an attempt to emphasise the rights of the Moscow suzerain. The first restricts the opportunities for efficient functioning of the general assembly of Novgorod and the legality of decisions taken there. This no doubt accorded well with the wishes of the social élite of the Republic; it followed the same lines as the political reforms that had been effected in Novgorod in the first half of the fifteenth century. Even if this hypothesis is incorrect, however, the fact remains that the grand prince's explicit injunction had no effect. In the 1460s and 1470s the *veche* continued to issue documents, *gramoty*, as before. If this attempt to curtail the rights of the Novgorod plebeians proved a failure, there is no reason to assume meticulous observance of the

¹⁷ GVNP, Nos. 22 and 23.

¹⁸ M. T. Florinsky, *Russia: a History and an Interpretation*, New York, 1955, I, p. 123.

¹⁹ *Ocherki istorii SSSR*, *op. cit.*, p. 268. Compare also the opposing minimalist view of V. L. Yanin, *Novgorodskie posadniki*, Moscow, 1962, p. 362.

second demand, which implied participation by the grand prince in the political matters of Novgorod. The seal of the Novgorodian authorities still remained the sole symbol of authority.²⁰

If this was a turning-point, it was only in the attitude of Moscow towards Novgorod, not in the actual balance of power. In 1456 Moscow tried to construct a new framework on which Novgorod's obligations could be based. However, the new conditions are only found scattered among the clauses of the supplementary agreement, while the main agreement submitted by the city's delegates is a reiteration of the agreements with the grand princes of Tver' or of former agreements with Moscow. Moscow could not enforce the most important of these clauses and Novgorod remained in a position to nullify their effect, as is shown by the events of 1460.

The third condition of importance in the supplementary agreement of Yazhelbitsy, in addition to the conditions concerning the veche and the use of the grand prince's seal, stipulated a mixed court, composed of a representative of the grand prince and of the Novgorodian boyars, to adjudicate cases arising between a Novgorodian and a Muscovite. The supreme judicial authority in these instances was to be the grand prince. These conditions were not new. The innovation lay in that they were explicitly and coherently defined. It is characteristic, however, that Grand Prince Vasiliy II's visit to Novgorod in 1460 was not made in the rôle of judge and suzerain, but in that of a pious traveller who wished to pray at the shrines of the saints of Novgorod. Even this excuse, however, did not allow the grand prince of Moscow to establish himself in the capital of the Republic that was formally under his rule. 'The circumstances of the stay of the princes of Moscow [Vasiliy came with his two sons] in Novgorod were not peaceful circumstances, but appertained to war', writes Cherepnin of this episode.²¹ After the veche had decided to take urgent measures to oppose him, the grand prince found himself besieged by the people of the city.²² During his sojourn there his men lived in perpetual danger; one night Basenok, commander of the Moscow force and victor of the battle of Staraya Rusa, was assaulted by some Novgorodian citizens.²³ Only later was the son and heir of Vasiliy II, the Grand Prince Ivan III, to translate the principles enunciated in the Yazhelbitsy agreement into the language of practical politics. This was in the early 1470s, when the position of the grand principality of Moscow had been further strengthened.

Moscow's superiority was to result in the Novgorodian defeat at

²⁰ L. V. Cherepnin, *Russkiye feudal'nyye arkhivy*, Moscow, 1948, I, p. 363.

²¹ L. V. Cherepnin, *Obrazovaniye . . .*, p. 523.

²² The Moscow Sophian second chronicle even states that they wished to kill the grand prince (*PSRL*, VI, p. 182).

²³ *PSRL*, V, p. 272; XXIII, p. 156.

Shelona, after which the leaders of the anti-Muscovite camp were killed. Yet the peace agreement²⁴ of Korostyn' following the fatal battle still did not bring about an absolute change in the status of the Republic. Some basic political resolutions were formulated which apparently did not have any great influence on Novgorod's specific status. The agreement stipulates complete renunciation of Novgorod's ties with Lithuania: it forbids the selection of the Lithuanian grand prince as prince of Novgorod, the invitation of serving princes from Lithuania or application to the head of the Orthodox Church. (This last condition, phrased in a circumlocutory manner, stresses the dependence of the Novgorod archbishop on the Moscow metropolitan.) In other respects the agreement would appear to resemble that of Yazhelbitsy. Even an overwhelming military victory could not effect a decisive change in Moscow—Novgorod relations.

The reason is to be sought primarily in the events in Novgorod which preceded Shelona. The general awakening to the situation provoked stormy discussions in the veche, where the pro-Lithuanian faction had the upper hand.²⁵ The intensive pro-Lithuanian activities conducted by the Boretsky family, headed by Marfa Boretskaya, were paralleled by the general readiness (the Moscow chronicle uses the expression 'ves' grad') of the Novgorodians to protect their country. After Shelona nothing could be done but yield to the invader, but it was evident that Novgorodian society would not lightly suffer an attempt aimed at complete destruction of its political principles. It is also possible that the grand prince's brothers did not altogether favour the additional power he thus gained. It might therefore be no accident that in both 1456 and 1471 the archbishop of Novgorod opened negotiations with Moscow through the grand prince's brother and his boyars, and that the grand prince agreed only after pressure had been exerted by them. At the same time, as we have already seen, the Lithuanian orientation of such a considerable part of the inhabitants of Novgorod indicated no more than an aspiration to acquire a more 'amenable' sovereign, owing to the growing harassment encountered from Moscow, rather than an attempt to divert Novgorod along a completely new path. In these circumstances, confronted by the failure of this policy after Shelona and the stand adopted by Casimir, the pro-Lithuanian solution to Novgorod's difficulties was dropped. The Korostyn' agreement constitutes an official recognition of this situation. For the present the best that the victorious grand prince of Moscow could accomplish was the formal renunciation by Novgorod of any attempt to exchange sovereigns.

²⁴ *GVNP*, Nos 26 and 27.

²⁵ *PSRL*, XXV, pp. 284–6.

Apart from one additional significant advance, the ratification of the Novgorodian 'sudnaya gramota' ('book of law') by the grand prince, we can discover Ivan III's deepest political intentions only by reading between the lines of the agreement. One important formal gain for the grand prince is the emphasis on his supremacy: 'bili chelom svoyey gospode velikim knyazem', and his inherited rights over Novgorod: 'vasha otchina velikiy Novgorod muzhi volnyye'. Yet only six years after the Korostyn' agreement a serious political dispute developed over the substitution for the term *gospodin* of *gosudar*'. After the Novgorodians had consented to give up their intended contact with Lithuania, there would be no logical reason for them to withhold recognition of the rights inherited by the grand prince, particularly since, in my opinion, it was the second part of the formula ('muzhi volnyye', 'free people') that penetrated to the Novgorodian consciousness rather than the first part. Its political structure as a city-state was left firmly established by the treaty. The 'free people' were left to pursue their political activities as citizens of the patrimony of the grand prince of Moscow. But the change now effected was later to constitute a basic factor in the downfall of the Republic: they had now surrendered the right to political manœuvre on an international scale. This was the sole importance of the Korostyn' agreement for Novgorodian history.

No change, therefore, took place in the balance of power in favour of the grand prince of Moscow. Although this may seem paradoxical in the wake of Shelona, the reason lay in the grand prince's inability, and perhaps also his unwillingness, to suppress by force the strong and united social-political front presented by the people of Novgorod and their authorities. This unity still existed, despite internal disputes among the various factions, representative of personal interests, or parties whose members differed only in their conception of the means to be used in the struggle to preserve the rights of Novgorod: their views on the basic political constitution were identical.²⁶ Any change in the situation could be achieved only by a deterioration on this front. Ivan III was to bend all his efforts to effect such a change in the following years.

We cannot ascertain what paved the way for the appearance of the grand prince in Novgorod in the autumn of 1475. But it is clear that the decision of some boyars and other citizens to apply to him as the supreme judicial authority was not the result of a sudden impulse; it was a deliberate step, which may have been delayed until the first opportunity presented itself to declare openly a pro-Moscow affiliation; (*Kuz'ma Yakovl'*, one of the petitioners, carried his complaints

²⁶ Compare, for example, Yanin's opinion on the 'Moscow orientation' (V. L. Yanin, *op. cit.*, p. 343).

as far afield as Volochok).²⁷ Sufficient testimony that Ivan's expedition was not the 'peaceful journey' ('pokhod mirom') to relieve the oppressed that the Moscow chronicles would have us believe, is given in the third Pskov chronicle (which was conspicuously pro-Moscow). At first it stressed that the cause of the visit of the grand prince, who came 'to judge in his patrimony', was complaints by the Novgorodians against their boyars. Later the chronicle mentions the tension prevailing in Novgorod at the grand prince's appearance and the feeling against him, describing the behaviour of his army, which took up position at the rear and indulged in looting like an invading force in enemy country.²⁸ It is characteristic that the Moscow chronicles do not recall this facet of Ivan III's 1475 expedition, and mention only its consequence: 'privede ikh vo vsyu svoyu volyu'.²⁹ The fourth Novgorodian chronicle, however, relates the situation as seen through the eyes of the Novgorodians: Ivan III made his appearance in Novgorod in November 1476 'with much force and in a time of peace'.³⁰

It was now no longer necessary to use religion as a pretext, as Ivan III's father had done in 1460. On entering the city the commander of the army prayed in St Sophia Cathedral, now no longer as a suppliant but as a sovereign rendering his due to the graves of his forefathers; on the following day he sat in his judicial capacity to consider the complaints brought before him. Here one may refer to another opinion held by some historians. It seems that, when dispensing justice in Novgorod, Ivan III did not only seek to gain the support of the Novgorodian populace.³¹ Application to him was made by persons belonging to various social strata ('many Novgorodians', in the words of the Moscow chronicle), but the only concrete case instanced in the chronicle is the complaint about attacks made by one Novgorodian street on another, i.e., a quarrel between boyar factions. The complainants were members of the Polinarin family.³² The consequence of this hearing was that a group of boyars, Bogdan Yesipov, Vasiliy Anan'in, Ivan and Olferiy Ofonasov, Ivan Loshinsky and Fyodor Isakov (Boretsky) were imprisoned. All of them were leaders of the anti-Moscow camp. Against the last two no accusations were preferred other than purely political ones ('they thought that Great Novgorod should deliver herself to the king').³³

²⁷ *PSRL*, XXV, p. 304.

²⁸ *Pskovskiye letopisi*, Moscow, 1955, II, pp. 200–2 (quoted hereafter as *PL*); for the behaviour of the Moscow army, see also *ULS*, p. 91.

²⁹ *PSRL*, XXIV, p. 195; XXVIII, p. 146.

³⁰ *PSRL*, IV/1, p. 449.

³¹ Of this there are only two examples, chronologically distant from each other: N. I. Kostomarov, *Severnorusskiye narodopravstvo*, St Petersburg, 1863, I, p. 201; L. A. Dmitrieva, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

³² *PSRL*, XXV, p. 305; V. L. Yanin, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

³³ *PSRL*, XXV, p. 306.

Thus, while meticulously observing legal niceties, the ruler of Moscow destroyed the heart of potential resistance in Novgorod. This was made possible because some Novgorodians were prepared to declare their loyalty to the grand prince and because he disposed of superior military strength. In general, however, the city seems to have refrained from levelling direct accusations against the 'traitors'. The grand prince evidently felt insecure, since he later released some prisoners (not, indeed, the six leaders mentioned, for whom, according to the Moscow chronicle, even the archbishop and the posadniks did not plead at that time).

After the grand prince's return to Moscow, the whole episode assumed a different character. Not only did he refuse repeated requests by the archbishop to release the six prisoners, but he started preparations for a new large-scale operation with the object of finally settling the issue and removing the last remnants of Novgorod's independence. The well-known episode involving the use of the terms *gospodin* and *gosudar'* furnished the excuse. Almost all historians are agreed that the despatch from Novgorod to Moscow in March 1477 of the two minor officials and their use of the title *gosudar'* was engineered by the conspiracy of a Moscow-oriented group.³⁴ Its chance of success depended on the fact that a stream of Novgorodians from various social strata came to Moscow for adjudication of their disagreements, which not only directly contradicted one of their most cherished principles (the limitation of jurisdiction over Novgorod citizens to Novgorod state territory), but was also a conspicuous innovation in the relations between the Novgorodians and their suzerain and in their attitude to Moscow as the capital of the Russian state.³⁵ At the head of these petitioners came Zakhar Ovinov, Vasiliy Nikiforov and 'many other posadniks'.

However, the grand prince proved to have erred in making this experiment. The subsequent disturbances in the veche resulted in the destruction—in the literal sense, for the two posadniks were put to death—of the pro-Moscow camp; those of its members who remained alive fled the city. Once again the Novgorodian populace (*chern'*) had taken affairs into its own hands. At that time some of the boyars had been ready to surrender to the ruler of Moscow; in the absence of veteran anti-Moscow leaders, it was the populace who spontaneously, yet acting within the traditional political framework, stood firm to protect the specific political structure of the Novgorodian Republic.³⁶

³⁴ For example: G. Vernadsky, *Russia at the dawn of the Modern Age*, New Haven, 1959, pp. 57–8; V. N. Bernadsky, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

³⁵ Not only was this emphasized in a number of the Moscow chronicles, e.g. *PSRL*, XXV, p. 309; XXVIII, p. 140; *Ioasafovskaya Letopis'*, Moscow, 1957, p. 96, but it was also transferred to shorter chronicles (for instance: A. A. Zimin, 'Kratkiye letopisy XV–XVI vv.' *Istoricheskiy arkhiv*, V, Moscow, 1950, p. 35).

³⁶ The major rôle of the populace in these events is also stressed in *ULS*, p. 92.

In April 1477 the Novgorodians gave the grand prince their answer. Their repudiation of the title *gosudar'* and of the jurisdiction of the grand prince and his officials in Novgorod is combined with a 'naïve' request to preserve *starina* and the principles of the Korostyn' agreement.³⁷ At the end of 1477 (in September?) the Novgorodians and their authorities decided to disregard the jurisdiction of the grand prince and his boyars, restricting it to Novgorodians alone.³⁸

Thus everything that Moscow had achieved by the agreements of Yazhelbitsy and Korostyn' and by the events of 1475/76 was imperilled. Without an army capable of opposing Moscow, lacking allies and experienced leadership, Novgorod made one more attempt, this time based on the strength of its citizens alone, to stabilise the situation. It was now inappropriate for Ivan III to exert diplomatic pressure, and he chose the direct method. He besieged the city and blockaded the roads by which food could be transported there.

It should not be assumed that the expedition of 1477/78 met no opposition, although none is mentioned by the official Moscow chronicles. The Novgorodian leaders were no longer ready for an open conflict, but this was not true of the Novgorodian populace. The brief mention in an unofficial Moscow source (the Yermolin chronicle) of a heavy bombardment of the city, which involved many casualties,³⁹ does not accord with the official account that no opposition was offered. What induced the grand prince to bombard the city, and why did he refrain from entering it afterwards? The answer is given by the third Pskovian chronicle, which states that the grand prince observed the strong wall around the city and, being unwilling to sacrifice many of his men, decided to lay siege to it.⁴⁰ But Ivan III must have known beforehand of the Novgorodian fortifications. Either the Novgorodians had managed to strengthen them to an unexpected extent or else the force protecting the walls seemed too strong.

From the very outset the prince's actions were characterised by caution. He always postponed the time when he would clearly reveal his true purpose. As early as 16 October he was informed that delegates from the Novgorodian archbishop had arrived, but only three weeks later, on 8 November, did he consent to hear their request that negotiations might be opened.⁴¹ In the meantime, however, the grand prince managed to draw closer to Novgorod with his army, to pick up reinforcements (among them the troops of the grand prince

³⁷ PSRL, IV, p. 256.

³⁸ PL, II, p. 209; L. V. Cherepnin, *Russkiye feudal'nye arkhivy*, I, pp. 228–9.

³⁹ PSRL, XXIII, p. 178 (but also 'Svod 1497 goda' in PSRL, XXVIII, p. 147).

⁴⁰ PL, II, p. 213–4.

⁴¹ Discussion of the events of the 1477/78 expedition and Novgorod's final surrender is based, where not otherwise noted, on PSRL, XXV, pp. 311–23.

of Tver'), to assure himself of the support of Pskov, and to give an audience to the Novgorodian boyars who were asking to join him. The grand prince besieged Novgorod in mid-November. By then his army included troops led by his three brothers and units from every region of Russia.

When the first Novgorodian embassy approached the grand prince, on 23 November, he withheld his reply for two days, during which time he seized the prince's castle (Gorodishche) and important monasteries near Novgorod. Having completely surrounded the city, he opened protracted negotiations with the Novgorodian representatives. For two weeks he merely hinted at his wishes instead of making explicit demands: 'They, our patrimony Great Novgorod, know themselves'. The more positive indication of his intentions was made only on 5 December: 'We, the grand princes, wish our rule to extend over Great Novgorod [our] patrimony, as over Moscow'.

On 30 November the grand prince had ordered all his commanders to send half their troops to seize all food supplies in the vicinity and there remained no possibility of smuggling provisions into the besieged city, whither many people from the neighbourhood had also fled. 'And there was a plague in the city and great hunger,' states the Yermolin chronicle.⁴² Since it was known to the people of Novgorod that many of their boyars had changed sides, or were ready to do so, feeling ran strongly in the city and severe quarrels broke out between the populace and the boyars.⁴³ The standpoint of the populace may be clearly deduced from the conduct of the Novgorodian embassy that reached the grand prince's camp on 7 December. This was the only one in which the people themselves were represented (there were five such delegates, one from each *konec* of Novgorod; thus it may be assumed that they had been legally elected in the veche). The spokesmen of the embassy, the posadniks, submitted detailed proposals to the grand prince, but they contained no suggestion of compromise or surrender; on the contrary, they attempted to lay down specific conditions for preserving Novgorod's traditional affiliation, something which previous embassies had tried to propose in more general terms. Their certainty of popular support, perhaps even the pressure to which the populace had subjected them, emboldened the embassy to put a 'proposition' before the ruler of Moscow, calling upon him to preserve the traditions of Novgorod, to give up his attempt to exercise legal jurisdiction over its citizens from Moscow, to refrain from interference in property matters and to respect the regional boundaries by not sending its inhabitants (both individuals and military units) elsewhere. (Here we may discern a hint that the Novgorodian army

⁴² *PSRL*, XXIII, p. 195.

⁴³ *PL*, II, p. 57.

might be maintained as a separate unit.) It was only when confronted with these specific uncompromising demands—notwithstanding the formal recognition of the title *gospodar'*—that the grand prince ceased to equivocate. But even now he did not stipulate unconditional surrender. He was willing to accede to most of the Novgorodian 'requests', with one minor exception: the jurisdiction could remain 'traditional', but the participation of the posadnik was to be excluded. By demanding abolition of the veche and the posadnik Ivan III was destroying the special political character of Novgorod, in exchange for a promise to preserve and respect the separate status of the territory within the framework of the emergent Russian state.

We have no knowledge of what transpired in Novgorod during the week 7–14 December. But no popular representatives were included in the subsequent embassy, which expressed readiness to accept the grand prince's demands. The official Moscow chronicle notes only that from 15 January 1479 the veche in Novgorod ceased to exist. Two days earlier the grand prince had been handed the pledge of fealty bearing the seals of the archbishop and of the five delegates representing the five quarters of the city. It would seem, therefore, that the city's institutions functioned until mid-January, thus enabling its representatives to argue over every detail of the agreement (among the points in dispute were the questions of taxation, of the land to be handed over to the grand prince, whether he should swear to honour the agreement, and the proposed establishment of his permanent court in Novgorod).

The grand prince entered Novgorod on 29 January, only after the Novgorodian institutions had been entirely abolished and the boyars and *zhitiye lyudi* had pledged their fealty, on 18 January. (One wonders what the reason was for this delay of twelve days.) On 1 February the grand prince began to mete out prison sentences to his former opponents (Marfa Boretskaya and others). The veche bell was transferred to Moscow.

Was Novgorod finally absorbed and integrated into the other districts of Russia under Moscow? Contrary to his usual practice with the other principalities he had attached to his estate, the grand prince started to banish many Novgorodians even before Novgorod's independence had been completely destroyed. He pursued this policy on a large scale during the first twenty years of his rule over the city. After the boyars came the turn of the *zhitiye lyudi*, merchants and small landowners. One of the first historians to investigate this period concluded that all the landowners of Novgorod were forced to leave their properties.⁴⁴ They were replaced by boyars and *dvoryane* from

⁴⁴ A. M. Andriyashev, *Materialy po istoricheskoy geografi Novgorodskoy zemli*, Moscow, 1914, pp. LVI–LVII (quoted by L. V. Bernadsky, *op. cit.*, p. 323).

Moscow, while *gosti* from Moscow replaced Novgorodian merchants.

Apparently, however, the lower orders of the Novgorodian population, the artisans and plebeians, peasants and slaves, boyars' servants and priests were not moved from their homes.⁴⁵ And in the sixteenth century the city, still the economic and social equal of Moscow,⁴⁶ continued its struggle to preserve what remained of its specific character within the framework of the emergent Russian monarchy. Sergey, the first archbishop sent to Novgorod from Moscow, was unsuccessful. In 1493 the Novgorodian clergy boycotted Archbishop Gennadiy for having worshipped the saints of Moscow. When Moscow tried to exert ideological pressure on Novgorod, by propagating the legend of St Michael of Klopsk and his prophecies of the destruction of the Republic, it was countered by other essays embracing far wider horizons. Of these the most important, the 'Tale of the White Cowl', anticipated later works of this kind by elevating Russia to the position of leader of the Orthodox world (i.e., of the entire world). It also foreshadows the struggle of Josephans to gain recognition of the primacy of the clergy over the secular authority. But in the words of the 'Tale' the spiritual and religious centre of this state is Novgorod, where the white cowl arrived!⁴⁷

Together with these attempts we find a constant readiness to resuscitate the Novgorodian tradition. It is not correct to say that the people of Novgorod forgot their ancient freedom.⁴⁸ The rulers of Moscow were compelled to preserve some remnants of the order that had existed under independence, such as the division of the area into five districts, the use of a seal similar to that of the former state, and the right to conduct separate diplomatic negotiations.⁴⁹ Furthermore, whenever there was a degeneration in the internal Russian situation, the independent spirit of the Novgorodians was reactivated. This happened in 1546 when a group of Novgorodian soldiers attempted to petition Ivan IV; after the bloody year of 1570, and at the time of the Smuta, when the *starosty* of the city's five districts strengthened their position (this institution existed during the whole

⁴⁵ Furthermore, in lieu of suitable manpower, it was the Novgorodian servants of the boyars who formed one of the basic elements in the formation of the *pomeshchiki* in the district of Novgorod (cf. B. D. Grekov, *Krest'yane Rusi s drevneyshikh vremen do XVII veka*, Moscow, 1952, I, p. 483; M. N. Tikhomirov, *Rossiya v XVI stolietii*, Moscow, 1962, p. 316; V. N. Bernadsky, *op. cit.*, p. 331, and above all K. V. Bazilevich, 'Novgorodskiye pomeshchiki iz posluzhil' tsev v kontse XV veka', *Istoricheskiye Zapiski*, 14, Moscow, 1945, passim).

⁴⁶ M. N. Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p. 301. According to Pronshteyn's calculations (A. N. Pronshteyn, *Velikiy Novgorod v XVI vekе*, Kharkov, 1957, p. 239) in the 16th century there were 25–30,000 inhabitants there.

⁴⁷ N. K. Gudziy, (ed.), *Khrestomatiya po drevney russkoy literature XI–XVII vekov*, Moscow, 1962, p. 247; N. N. Rozov, 'Povest' o novgorodskom belom klobuke kak pamyatnik obshcherusskoy publitsistiki XV veka' (*Trudy otstola drevnerusskoy literatury*, IX, Moscow-Leningrad, 1953, p. 205).

⁴⁸ N. I. Kostomarov, *op. cit.*, I, p. 229.

⁴⁹ M. N. Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, pp. 278–9; A. N. Pronshteyn, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

of the sixteenth century).⁵⁰ This spirit made itself manifest for the last time in revolt in Novgorod the Great in 1650.⁵¹ Only then, with the rapid development of what was to become the modern absolutist state, did the last remnants of the medieval Russian city-state finally disappear.

⁵⁰ B. D. Grekov, 'Ocherki po istorii Novgorodskogo Sofiyskogo Doma XVI–XVII vv.', *Izbrannyye Trudy*, III, Moscow, 1960, pp. 109, 114; M. N. Tikhomirov, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁵¹ M. N. Tikhomirov, 'Novgorodskoye vosstaniye 1650 g.', (*Istoricheskiye Zapiski*, 7, Moscow, 1940, *passim*).